

Indiana Clean Community Challenge

What is the Clean Community Challenge?

Established by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) in the early 2000's, the Clean Community Challenge, a voluntary program which recognizes Indiana's cities and towns that take proactive, positive environmental actions, was one of the first of its kind in the nation. To ensure a better quality of life for all Hoosiers, the purpose of the program has always been to challenge and reward municipalities for proactive work to build a healthy economy while positively addressing community environmental and social issues.

Municipalities choose activities that fit their community goals. IDEM recognizes the many environmental challenges municipalities face on a day-to-day basis under limited budgets, and through this program, assists municipalities with these challenges and publicly recognizes the successes achieved.

How is the Challenge different today?

During 2019, IDEM met with community leaders and interested parties to review the Clean Community Challenge to identify opportunities to improve the program. As a result of these meetings, the Challenge is now accepting a broader range of projects, including those with a focus on sustainability rather than only focusing on municipal systems. In addition, the new changes encourage cooperation and partnership with residents and businesses to identify and implement projects important to the community. Finally, IDEM has streamlined the Challenge to remove many of the time-consuming paperwork requirements. An example of the new streamlined approach is a 3-tiered membership, allowing communities to step through the program at their own pace rather than requiring it to fulfill all requirements right off the bat. In addition, IDEM has added a system which takes community population into account when determining the number of projects that must be implemented for membership. Each of these changes allow communities to focus on implementing projects and entering the program sooner.



Figure 1: Now communities can receive recognition for projects in multiple categories with an overall focus on community sustainability and resiliency.

What are the costs to the city or town? Is assistance available for communities?

There is no fee to participate. A community will be assigned an IDEM Office of Program Support contact to serve as an ambassador throughout their participation in the program. Through IDEM's Compliance and Technical Assistance Program, communities will have free, confidential, on-site assistance available for identifying project opportunities and researching implementation strategies. In addition, during 2021 and 2022, in cooperation with the Indiana University Sustainability Development Program, IDEM is planning to offer externs to five (5) pilot communities at no cost to the community. These externs will provide the capacity to conduct research and implementation of specific projects on the community's behalf. In addition, the externs will gather, and report results of the implemented projects. Additional assistance is provided to communities

through a membership Teams channel that allows IDEM to notify members of grant funding opportunities as well as technical assistance webinars, conferences, and meetings in real time. IDEM also hosts the Clean Community Challenge Annual Meeting, providing a network of community peers to share ideas for implementing sustainability programs at the local level in Indiana.

How does a community join?

The Challenge is open to all Indiana municipalities including cities, towns, and county levels of government. After notifying IDEM of their interest in the program, a community will step through the levels of membership from Bronze to Gold at their own pace.

Working with their Clean Teams (a small group of municipality staff, residents, and local interested parties), communities choose projects from at least two different categories. The number of projects a community must implement will be based on the size (population) of the community. Small communities must implement at least 4 projects per level; medium communities must implement 6; and large communities must implement at least 8 projects per level. IDEM's website will provide descriptions of 30 pre-approved projects communities may choose to implement. These projects reflect IDEM and Governor priorities. However, communities may propose additional projects for approval. If communities have already implemented projects, they may submit those for review; if approved, those existing projects may count toward the required number of projects to be implemented. Each year, IDEM will review its list of pre-approved projects and make updates based on feedback from interested parties.

Once projects have been implemented, CTAP staff may revisit the communities to tour completed projects and ensure they meet the minimum standards. As with all IDEM OPS recognition programs, successful applicants must have a positive environmental history, and this will be determined through the IDEM compliance check process. Communities needing compliance assistance with regulatory requirements will be eligible for free, confidential assistance from CTAP.

A Clean Advisory Committee made up of Clean members, non-profits (Indiana University Environmental Resilience Institute and Earth Charter Indiana), and other parties (Office of Community and Rural Affairs and Accelerate Indiana Municipalities) that promote the needs of communities will review and approve communities as they move up each level of the Challenge. The Advisory Committee will meet at least semiannually and will also provide IDEM with suggestions and ideas for continuously improving the Clean experience for communities.

Members report results to IDEM each year. This provides additional opportunities to promote the successes of individual communities through press releases, on IDEM's website, through IDEM social media, and through best practice video highlights. Communities maintain membership through active attendance at annual meetings, completion of projects, increasing membership levels, and mentoring new members.

Bronze Level

- Have a positive environmental history – as determined by an IDEM compliance check
- Join the Challenge by adopting a sustainability resolution or ordinance (to show high level community commitment)
- Create a Clean Team (to show dedicated resources are available to achieve sustainability goals)
- Attend the Clean Annual Meeting

Silver Level

- Meet Bronze level requirements
- Post information on the community's web site about what has been accomplished.
- Be recognized for implementing between 4 - 8 best practices (depending on community size)
- Measure and report on performance metrics

Gold Level

- Meet Bronze and Silver level requirements
- Implement at their own pace an additional 4 – 8 best practices (depending on community size)
- Measure and report on performance metrics

Figure 2 Communities step through 3 levels of achievement at their own pace.

What are the goals of the 2021- 2022 pilot program?

IDEM has identified five pilot communities to test the new format of the program. The first year of the program (April 2021 – March 2022) will consist exclusively of these pilot communities. After the year is complete, the externs assigned to each pilot community will conduct assessments of the new Clean program and compile a report to IDEM with recommendations. The first annual meeting will serve as an opportunity for the communities to provide feedback on potential improvements to the program. The agency will use the feedback and make changes before rolling out the program statewide.

What are the benefits to participating?

The answers to this question will be different for different communities, but here are the key points. The Clean Community Challenge will assist communities to:

- **Become more sustainable and resilient** by using a pathway for continuous improvement.
- **Save staff time** by using program resources to select proven, cost-effective actions for cutting energy use, decreasing the community's carbon footprint, and accomplishing other sustainability goals that exceed regulatory requirements.
- **Save money** and deliver a stream of multiple environmental, social, and financial benefits; explore how to spend the same amount of money smarter.
- **Implement proven best practices** relevant to the community.
- **Open doors to special opportunities** for funding and technical assistance. IDEM has reached out to several state agencies to request special consideration for members of the Challenge.
- **More easily apply for competitive grants** and assistance programs.
- **Provide leadership and action roles** for community members, businesses, and institutions to stretch limited community funds and strengthen a civic culture of engagement and innovation.
- **Maximize opportunities** to accelerate sustainability actions via continuous prompts – like an exercise coach!
- **Receive public recognition** for the good work being done in the community.
- **Support state and local initiatives** simultaneously.

What recognition will communities receive?

- **Peer recognition** at workshops and conferences.
- **Visibility** on the Clean Community web site and in IDEM press releases
- **Artwork and recognition materials** (logos, street signs).